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From the Editor

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After I recently became editor-in-chief of this journal, the editorial board suggested that a tradition be revived that many journals, including this one until a few editors ago, follow. This tradition is to provide to its readers a regular overview of the journal, its workings, and the field it covers. Victor Raskin, and for a brief time Larry Mintz after him, wrote such a column for the first issue of each odd volume from 1988 to 2002. The column was suspended when HUMOR was urgently pressed for space for actual research to be published under the editorship of Salvatore Attardo, and never resumed under Giseline Kuipers or Thomas E. Ford, for the same reason. Through several editorial measures and agreements with the publisher, as well as because recent editors have efficiently addressed HUMOR's publication backlog, the space for such a column is now available again. These measures included the separation of the journal and the ISHS newsletter, the publication of book reviews for free on the journal's website instead of in print, and an overall budget increase in page numbers.

The editor's main responsibility is to closely read and carefully evaluate each submission as to its merit to the field, with the help of trusted peer reviewers from its boards of editors and consulting editors and other experts not (yet) on the journal's boards. Larry Mintz promised to combine the two boards at the beginning of his tenure as editor-in-chief (issue 13-1, 2002), but this never happened. De Gruyter wondered if we could reduce the number of humor researchers being recognized in this fashion when I started. I disagreed, because it seems a justifiable means to recognize the efforts of these regular reviewers, as they develop from reader to reviewer to consulting editor, and maybe to editorial board member or editor-in-chief, before retirement from the field. This recognition encourages participation through recognized inclusion. I have of course made changes to these editorial bodies when I started and continue to do so by request and in response to increased or decreased, or even ceased and sometimes sadly deceased, participation in our endeavor to understand humor, laughter, and related phenomena.

Reading each submission, as well as its reviews, affords the editor a privileged viewpoint over the tidings in humor research. To report from that viewpoint, the

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column “From the Editor” is now revived with the help of the editorial assistant, who is still Andrew Olah. He joined under the previous editor-in-chief and agreed to continue with me. I gladly consult him for the everyday running of the journal, not least because he is a trusted straight man to my non-psychological fool running a journal that receives a substantial number of its submissions from the field of psychology. Andrew’s expertise complements mine, having worked in close collaboration with psychologists for decades, including doing a postdoc in a department of psychology, for the task of selecting appropriate reviewers for submissions from psychology. We receive these welcome submissions in numbers that are remarkable, in view of the fact that as a multi-, if not as interdisciplinary as desired, journal, our impact factor will forever be unable to compete with those of niche journals in single disciplines. In general, my multidisciplinary background across the arts and sciences has already proven to be an asset in the processing of the many submissions that this journal also receives from all the disciplines apart from psychology and linguistics (my home field, if linguistics can be considered to be just one field).

In his first column “From the Editor” in HUMOR 1-1 (1988), Raskin identified the following players in the emerging humor conferences as organized at the time by Alleen and Don Nilsen: “humor researchers, usually with academic credentials and affiliations in other fields; humor manufacturers and deliverers, that is, comedians and copy writers (and probably publishers); humor recorders, both oral and written, the latter being the Compilers of printed joke books; humor users, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and therapists who are using or thinking of using humor with their patients; consumers and do-it-yourselfers, that is, the general public who appreciate humor as a commodity and are willing to pay for its various manifestations with money and/or time” (Raskin 1988: 1).

Over the course of over 30 years, the journal succeeded in shifting the submissions to the first category, that of humor researchers, thanks to the efforts of several generations of editors and supporting boards. This is truly an accomplishment reflecting the maturity of our field, not least with respect to practitioners of humor: their outlets should be stages and screens, not academic journals. Just as fungi and mushrooms rely on their spores for propagation rather than submitting articles to mycology journals or even making appearances at conferences (mycologists have been grateful!). I hope to be forgiven to add another metaphor to this point made strongly by Raskin since founding this journal in 1988. There is of course value for humor researchers in talking to humor practitioners, but this needs to be done methodologically, especially when it’s done qualitatively. Otherwise, one runs into the well-known problem of talking to the native speaker: they just speak, well, natively. There is no reason to assume that they know what they’re doing. Some, of course, do.

But humor research is still plagued by misconceptions of it as a merry playground for gentleperson geniuses from “more serious” fields. We keep receiving submissions by more-or-less established scholars, who assume that their theory *du jour* having accomplished something in their field of application puts them in a position to contribute to humor research. This well-known misconception about our field is that humor is silly so that humor research is silly and humor researchers are generally silly amateurs. After all, “it’s just humor, right?” Thus, these newcomer amateurs don’t think they have to do their homework by even considering what has been accomplished in humor research either in their own discipline or from all the other disciplines that contribute to it. Because their strike of genius, as usual, explains humor, and usually explains it *in toto*. Such amateurish windmill-fighting should not be published so as to not contaminate future research. Newcomers from any field are of course not barred from publishing in HUMOR, on the contrary. They just need to acknowledge the work that’s been done, explain why and how that work falls short, and why their proposal is worthy of attention as an improvement or alternative. In general, we’d just like for authors to have done their homework, so our reviewers don’t have to remind them of the substantial critical responses that mere ruminations, quite regularly of the Hobbesian, Bergsonian, Freudian, Bakhtinian, or Raskinian kind, have already received. Additional “Erkenntnisgewinn” (gain in insight), as some say in a formerly relevant language, is usually slim where certain vocabularies are merely reused, often in apparent meta-fashion of newly coined “-cognitive” or other compound adjectives.

After this long introduction intended to bridge 20 years of editorial silence, what is the lay of the land of HUMOR, briefly? HUMOR recently published a special issue on humor in relation to the current COVID-19 pandemic (34/2). Unsurprisingly, manuscripts on the topic keep getting submitted as they were submitted before the call for that issue. Unsurprisingly, again, they are of mixed quality, like submissions about any other topic. Many aim to relate humor styles (or similar constructs) and coping with the pandemic, often in different populations but rarely with interesting comparative perspectives. Should authors seek to publish research on this topic in HUMOR, they must be sure to provide a rationale for why they believe the phenomenon would be any different in their study’s population versus the populations examined in published studies. There are thousands of cultures in the world, each with a plethora of subcultures (e.g., political, geographical) and demographics (e.g., age, socioeconomic status, gender); to publish research on the same topic for each country or intersection on the sole basis of “they haven’t been studied on this topic before” would fill up hundreds of volumes on that single topic alone, and we sincerely hope that COVID-19 doesn’t remain relevant for that long. As projected in the special issue, another one of its kind may well be in the future of this journal, hopefully with the possibility of a perspective on humor during and *after* the

pandemic. We have two other special issues coming up, one being another well-deserved *Festschrift*, the other on humor and the law, with further special issues taking shape already. In terms of frequency, we aim to have only one special issue per volume to allow regular submissions to be published in print without too much delay after their online preprint publication soon after their acceptance.

Looking outside the pandemic, we noticed a remarkable abundance of submissions on standup comedy in African, especially West African societies. The reason most of these were rejected was a lack of comparative perspective beyond just remarking the under-operationalized “subversive” power of the work of usually just a single comedian or even single shows. Hopefully, an edited volume of this work providing a larger perspective and thus insights can be produced by researchers in this area, as I suggested to most of these submitting authors. In terms of general numbers of submissions and acceptances, we’re getting more and more healthy. By that I mean that submission numbers slowly increase and the acceptance rate remains steady without us pushing a large backlog ahead of us, not least thanks to the diligent work of my predecessors, or issues getting published with room to spare. More details on these numbers are planned to be the main topic of the next column from the editor, based on a recent survey of submissions and acceptances by fields of research and other factors, and possible efforts at diversification. A few final observations, very briefly: jokes are out and memes are in; there are still some who think open access is the only ethical solution in academic publishing, overlooking the new inequalities these models entail; humor in the workplace and in the classroom are getting more attention again; and please don’t start your manuscript by citing a Wikipedia definition of “humor.”

It has only been a little over a year that I have had the privilege of being the editor-in-chief of HUMOR (as “incoming” at first in 2020). I am grateful to all my predecessors, most of them also friends or more, and in particular to my immediate predecessor for helping to transition me into this position for a journal in the best shape it has been in. I had been closely following the journal as a reader since 1994, when I attended a seminar on “Language and Humour” as part of my first master’s degree obtained in Europe. At the time I was fully expecting to one day take on the responsibility of being HUMOR’s editor-in-chief. Naturally. Now I’ll let you know in a year (or two), hopefully with the help of Andrew again as we did this time, what further insights those years as a reader, contributor, reviewer, member of the boards, and now in particular as editor-in-chief will have yielded.